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ABSTRACT

This declaration by the Caucus on the Needs of the Youngest Americans discusses ways in which the federal government can meet the needs of young children and their families. The declaration calls for the federal government to insure that all services for children and families are coordinated and comprehensive; insure that every young child receives high quality care regardless of setting; and help public schools respond more appropriately and effectively to the real needs of young children and their families. Discussion of each of these challenges includes recommendations for action by President Clinton and the 103rd Congress. The representatives of 23 organizations who signed the declaration are listed. (BB)

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Raising Responsible Americans

Three Challenges to the Nation

A Declaration

by the

Caucus on the Needs of the Youngest Americans

January 23, 1993

Atlanta, Georgia

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Challenges to the Nation

- I. Insure that all services for children and families are coordinated and comprehensive because the needs of young children and their families are all interrelated. This coordination should include, but not be limited to, all activities of the departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Labor, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, Defense, Commerce, and Interior that have an impact on children and families.

We recommend that President Clinton and the U.S. Congress take the following steps:

- Create a high-level coordinating council for all federal services to young children and families. This council should have the authority to require interagency collaboration and to make changes in programs and services to make them more effective.
- Establish a formal set of guiding principles for all existing and new programs which serve young children and families.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of existing and proposed federal legislation and regulations to identify and correct conflicts and inconsistencies in services to young children and their families. This review should pay special attention to eligibility requirements and procedures for government services which should be complementary.
- Recommend new federal policies and initiatives on young children and their families.
- Promote program evaluation at all levels of government based upon desired outcomes rather than administrative criteria.
- Insure that federally-supported programs and services be accessible to all eligible children and their families.

- II. Insure that every young child receives high quality care regardless of setting.

We recommend that President Clinton and the Congress take the following steps:

- Create an interdisciplinary office of child development, at least at the level of assistant secretary, within the Department of Health and Human Services. The staff of this office should include experts in child development, early childhood education, health, and social services.
- Implement a long-term, vivid public awareness campaign on the fundamental importance of caring for all young children. This campaign should be comparable to recent advertising campaigns on drunk driving, drug abuse, and smoking.
- Build a national consensus on criteria for care that supports the growth and development of all young children. These criteria should address the following issues:
 - Developmentally appropriate practice in all child care settings. (The term "developmentally appropriate" refers to the standard that curriculum, instruction, and assessment be appropriate to a learner's individual developmental level.)
 - Training and qualifications of those who work with young children.
 - Fair compensation for those who work with young children.

- Empowerment of families as teachers of and advocates for young children.
- Respect for cultural diversity.
- Primary and preventive health care.
- Monitoring and technical assistance to insure program quality.

III. Help public schools respond to the real needs of young children and their families.

We recommend that President Clinton take the following steps:

- Create an interdisciplinary office of early childhood, at least at the level of assistant secretary, within the Department of Education. This office should support establishment of developmentally appropriate programs in public schools in order to meet the real needs of young children and their families. The staff of this office should include experts in early childhood education, child development, health, and social services. The responsibilities of this office should include:

- Supporting coordination of health and social services within public schools.
- Supporting primary school programs which are developmentally appropriate and depend upon authentic assessment of children's progress, significant family involvement, professional teamwork, and a recognition of the continuous nature of young children's progress as learners.
- Encouraging school practices which respect and value children's diverse home cultures and languages.
- Assessing the need for preservice and inservice training in developmentally appropriate practice for teachers and administrators and providing benchmarks for new and enhanced training.
- Supporting appropriate, effective transitions from early childhood programs to public schools.
- Supporting primary school programs which are sensitive to the needs of working parents.

- Implement a long-term, vivid public awareness campaign on the vital importance of developmentally appropriate practice in all public services to young children and their families. This campaign should be comparable to recent advertising campaigns on drunk driving, drug abuse, and smoking.

- Redirect existing resources to better coordinate federal services which support young children's cognitive, social and emotional, and physical development. This should include but not be limited to:

- Promoting the use of Chapter I funds for use in early childhood intervention programs rather than emphasizing remedial programs.
- Supporting the Chapter I Commission's recommendation that school districts have more flexibility in designing programs for young children and their families.

As Bill Clinton has written, "we have to face the fact that too many children are being born into families where they will not get the kind of preparation they need unless the government steps in." We believe the American people are ready to meet the challenges of supporting young children and their families.

We call upon President Clinton and the 103rd Congress to lead us in this new beginning.

Signers

- | | |
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Raising Responsible Americans

Bill Clinton told the world November 3, 1992 that Americans want a new beginning. He heard and echoed Americans' belief that all areas of federal policy affect the economic strength of the nation. He spoke for Americans who want every citizen, from minimum-wage workers to the President, to take economic responsibility. He spoke for Americans who want a country where every citizen holds a job and helps pay society's bills — and where every citizen has a home, decent schooling, and health care.

We believe that each and every child, regardless of race, ethnicity, economic condition, or birthplace, represents the potential for such a new beginning. Each child can become a contributing citizen. Every young American offers the promise to transform at least some small corner of the world — if the world recognizes that child's unique value as a human being.

But to meet the obligations of citizenship, children need years of nurturing. The entire society must help in this task, investing in children so they eventually can meet their full potential.

- Parents must feed, shelter, nurture, and love their children.
- Communities must befriend and protect their children.
- Society must guarantee to children a healthy birth, care by emotionally healthy adults, and learning environments that support the greatest possible cognitive, emotional, social, and physical achievement.

We believe that the nation can make sure that every American child grows up with these basic rights. To make this investment in our youngest Americans, the federal government must meet three critical policy challenges. Those challenges are:

- I. To insure that all services for children and families are coordinated and comprehensive because the needs of young children and their families are all interrelated.
- II. To insure that every young child receives high quality care regardless of setting.
- III. To help public schools respond more appropriately and effectively to the real needs of young children and their families.

We call upon the Clinton-Gore Administration to convene a Summit on the Youngest Americans in order to obtain the best ideas from around the country on how to meet these challenges. Like the December, 1992 economic summit, this occasion would draw the nation's attention to the hard policy decisions we must make in order to invest in the potential of every young American.

Representatives of 23 organizations devoted to the wellbeing of children and families met January 8, 1993 at Atlanta, Georgia to develop these challenges to the nation. Save the Children, the Southern Early Childhood Association, and the Southern Regional Education Board convened the meeting.

For more information about Save the Children, SECA, or SREB, or for more information about public services to young children and their families, please contact one of the following:

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